



S25/6

POLICY REGISTER

Subject: STAFF - Critical Incident Management Policy

| | <i>Current</i> | <i>Previous</i> | <i>Prior</i> | <i>Prior</i> |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Minute No: | 54 | | | |
| Meeting Date: | 13/03/2006 | | | |
| Review Date: | February 2008 | | | |

POLICY

Aim

The aim of this policy is to:

- Assist staff in responding appropriately to incidents that are likely to cause trauma to individuals and/or affect the Council as a whole; and
- Establish basic procedures and reporting systems to cover preventative measures, immediate responses, and follow-up actions to deal both with the immediate consequences and the longer term implications of a critical incident. and
- Minimize grievances by taking preventative or corrective action.

Applicability

This policy applies to all Staff, Councillors, Volunteers and Contractors of Muswellbrook Shire Council.

Variation

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this policy.

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

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(OH&S, EEO, EAP)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Muswellbrook Shire Council Critical Incident Management Policy (CIMP) was developed to have procedures and management strategies for the Muswellbrook Shire Council's co-ordinated response to critical incidents affecting staff and volunteers.

The policy is designed as a guide to assist staff in responding appropriately to incidents that are likely to cause trauma to individuals and/or affect the Council as a whole. The policy establishes basic procedures and reporting systems to cover preventative measures, immediate responses, and follow-up actions to deal both with the immediate consequences and the longer term implications of a critical incident. Given that the needs of the individual sites may vary and to allow for the individual abilities and judgement of staff, the policy is in broad terms and is designed to be amended to incorporate ongoing feedback which is essential to the management of all critical incidents.

A short statement explaining the nature of this document will be prepared. It is the responsibility of the Human Resources Manager to ensure that all staff receive a copy of this statement and are aware of the policy and basic guidelines that it contains. Copies should automatically be given to new staff when they report to Human Resources for their general induction. Copies of the actual policy document will be made available to all sections, teams and departments of the Council.

While this deals policy specifically with the management of critical incidents, it is not intended that it should stand alone but should be used in conjunction with other Council manuals, policies and procedures.

2. CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Internal:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Human Resources Manager | 65493729 |
| Human Resources Officer | 65493727 |
| Occupational Health & Safety Officer | 65493719 |

External:

| | |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| Muswellbrook Police | 000 |
| Ambulance | 000 |
| Fire Brigade | 000 |
| Muswellbrook Hospital | 65422000 |
| Denman Hospital | 65473999 |
| State Emergency Services | 132500 |
| Lifeline | 131114 |
| Sexual Assault Unit | 1 800 424 017 |
| Red Cross Rural Support Link | 1 800 451 526 |

3. DEFINITION

In general terms, a critical incident is defined as a traumatic event which does or is likely to cause extreme physical and/or emotional distress to staff and may be regarded as outside the normal range of experience of the people affected. A critical incident may take place either on or off the work area. In other words, this policy is not limited to handling only those incidents that might occur on Council worksites.

Assessment of an incident must take into account both the reaction of the individual or individuals directly affected and the wider ranging effects on members of the Council community at large that is staff, volunteers Councillors and their respective families. It should also be borne in mind that people react in different ways both in their immediate and in their longer term responses to events.

In assessing a critical incident, consideration must be given to the prevailing factors and mood of the staff at the time of the incident. For example, if a major incident such as vandalism or assault has occurred in a specific building and this is followed soon after by a minor incident such as petty theft in the same building, given the mood of those who have been affected by the first incident, the second minor incident may well produce additional stress for these people. In this case, the second incident should be regarded as a critical incident although normally petty theft would be regarded as minor.

Some examples of critical incidents:

Any fatality, near fatality or incident likely to affect seriously a number of staff and/or volunteers;

- Serious traffic accidents;
- Murder or suicide involving staff/volunteers or their family members;
- Physical or sexual assault;
- Injury or death of a colleague;
- Fire, explosion, bomb threat;
- Hold-up or attempted robbery;
- Threats of violence to staff/volunteers;
- Major theft or vandalism;
- Threat of HIV infection;
- Incidents involving pain or abuse of children;
- Incidents in which sights, sounds, or smells are distressing;
- Storms or natural disasters;
- Critical illness of staff/volunteers;

4. CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE COUNSELLORS

Qualified Critical Incident Response Counsellors will be provided by the Council for assistance with debriefing, defusing and follow-up. It is the council's responsibility to determine whether or not the incident is a critical incident, and if so deemed, to put into place the Critical Incident Management Procedures.

An incident or potential incident should be reported to the relevant Supervisor immediately if there is an immediate risk to life or property. Where necessary, in such cases, evacuation procedures should be put in place. If the incident does not appear to require the immediate dispatch of Emergency Services, the relevant Manager should be notified immediately and given the full details of the situation including the exact location of the incident and the type of incident. It is then their responsibility to pass on the information to the nominated authority who will determine the gravity of the situation together with advising the General Manager of the situation.

5. PREVENTION AND PREPARATION

While it is impossible to foresee a critical incident, staff are encouraged to be aware of the importance of planning to mitigate the effects of a traumatic event. The following should be used as a guide to prevention and preparation:

Emergency telephone contact numbers for both the External Emergency Services (000) and relevant Council staff should be prominently displayed in all offices and common staff areas.

The availability of appropriate resources and the development of safety measures will be monitored on a regular basis through the relevant sections of Council and the Occupational Health and Safety Committee (see Item 9). Staff and volunteers should be encouraged to bring issues of safety to the attention of their immediate supervisors who should bring such issues to the attention of management. Risk Assessments should be undertaken or reviewed to include the likelihood of a traumatic event occurring.

The Occupational Health & Safety Coordinator will maintain regular liaison with local and regional services to provide contact numbers for information during emergency situations.

Each Manager will consider the provision of training programs for staff in areas of responding to emergency situations and stress management. It is important that staff members with supervisory responsibilities receive special training.

All staff and volunteers are to be made aware of safety and evacuation policies as listed in Item 9.

Amendments to this policy will be circulated via the Staff Consultative and Occupational Health & Safety Committees.

6. THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

The key to an effective and relevant response to a critical incident is COORDINATION. This will be achieved by following these important steps:

The initial response to a critical incident will be notification of the incident to the appropriate Emergency Services, if necessary, and then to Councils Human Resources Manager.

The Human Resources Manager will immediately contact the General Manager and the appropriate Department Manager.

Notification should include the type of incident, the exact location and details of any person or persons who might be injured, in distress, or at risk. This should be documented to aid recollection later.

If people are at risk, they will be removed from the area and/or assistance will be rendered as necessary. The incident area will be sealed off if required.

Contact telephone numbers for all staff, volunteers or people affected will be collected. If any incident affects a person under the age of 18 years the parent/guardian will be notified.

7. FOLLOW-UP ACTION

A critical incident does not end with the immediate response. Important follow-up procedures must be implemented in the areas of counselling, information dissemination, and debriefing. These issues are the responsibility of the Human Resources Section who will:

- Disseminate appropriate follow up information regarding the incident to staff, volunteers, and all those affected by the incident. Only the General Manager (or the nominated officer) is permitted to release information to the media in accordance with Councils Public Comment Policy (P45/1).
- Complete full reports of the incident and provide a copy to the General Manager, including the date, time location, people involved, witnesses, description of the incident and immediate action taken.
- Lodge statements with the Police if required.
- Notify the Mayor and Councillors if required.
- Provide literature to those affected by the incident on the possible short- and long-term effects.

Debriefing should be offered within 48 hours of incident. The choice of accepting debriefing lies with the affected person. All those affected should be offered debriefing, if it is refused this should be reported to the General Manager.

Those that chose to undergo debriefing should be given the choice of Counsellors. It is preferable if the Counsellors were located locally.

If counsellors are engaged to provide debriefing to affected staff, Council needs to ensure that the Counsellor is prepared to provide written documents to Councils Insurer if the incident results in a Workers Compensation Claim.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Council has approved an EAP for the provision of employee counselling services to Council staff and their families free of charge (up to 4 visits) as part of an ongoing Employee Assistance Program. Details are available from Human Resources Staff.

8. EVALUATION

Evaluation of the Council's response to a critical incident is essential to the on-going development and effectiveness of the critical incident procedures. The following guidelines should be noted:

Shortly after the incident, the Critical Incident Response Counsellors, in consultation with the Human Resources Manager, will evaluate the implementation of procedures and responses.

Ongoing consultations will be held with staff and volunteers on critical response strategies as necessary.

Supervisory staff will be encouraged to undertake training relevant to the handling of a critical incident and post-trauma stress management. Senior Staff will be asked to include such training in their annual programs.

9. OTHER COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND PROCEDURES

Guidelines and checklists in this policy should be considered in conjunction with other Council committees and documented procedures.

Occupational Health & Safety Committees

The responsibility of these Committees is to oversee the Council's various Occupational Health and Safety Policies to ensure, on each worksite, a safe and healthy workplace for staff, volunteers, and visitors. The Committees oversee regular safety audits of buildings, action plans to ensure safe working practices and a continuous consultative process on occupational health and safety matters. The Incident Report form, which is supplied to all sections of Council, is to be used to report all hazardous acts and/or conditions, which could result in illness or injury, as well as all accidents, injuries and cases of ill health which are directly related to a person's occupation.

Equal Employment Opportunity Committee

The responsibility of the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee is to provide information on anti-discrimination legislation, the Council's policy on freedom from harassment, and general equity issues.

Human Resources Section

Staff from this area will conduct audits of the effectiveness of this CIMP and Procedures, facilitate relevant training of supervisory staff, and ensure all staff are made aware of this policy and procedure during the induction process.